Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study of *Transformed: My Life in God’s Kingdom* these sermon outlines will use the same Scripture passages as the small group study, so the pastor can reinforce the study from the pulpit.

The Point: The way we treat others should reflect the way we’re treated by God.

Introduction: After I graduated from seminary, two years passed before I was called to my first pastorate. For most of that period, I paid the bills by working in a department store. I’ll always believe God had a hand in that because it gave me some of my best training for ministry. I learned some very important lessons about dealing with people. In retail, everything depends on customers, and workers must keep them happy if they want to succeed. If you’ve worked in that kind of business, you know it’s not always easy! I used to joke that retail would be an easy job if it weren’t for the customers. My coworkers would inevitably reply that if it weren’t for the customers, I would have no job.

Some people might protest that the church is not a retail business. I agree, and I don’t believe it’s biblical to keep people happy at all costs (Galatians 1:10). Nevertheless, people are important to God and the church. Christ loved people enough to die for them, and without people, there would be no church. It’s not always to deal with people in the church, and we pastors know that better than anyone. How should we deal with people in the church, even when they’re being difficult? Just remember three things:

I. The proper perspective.

   A. Jesus commanded us not to judge others.
      1. What Jesus did not mean:
         a. He did not mean we should not form opinions of others. Otherwise, His warnings in verses 15 through 20 would be rather pointless.
         b. He did not mean we should not rebuke others that are in sin. True, we must do it in a loving spirit, but we must still do it (1 Cor. 5:1-13; Galatians 6:1; 2 Timothy 4:2).
      2. What Jesus did mean:
         a. We should not be too hasty in forming opinions of others.
         b. We should balance our judgment with mercy (v. 2).
   B. Remember that you have your own faults.
      1. Jesus used the illustration of trying to take a splinter out of someone else’s eye when you have a log in your own.
         • People sometimes ask if Jesus had a sense of humor. In my opinion, this verse clearly indicates that He did. Can you imagine someone walking around with a huge log in his eye, and criticizing
someone else for having a small splinter in his eye? The picture is ridiculous, and it likely evoked laughter from Jesus’ listeners.

2. Before you rebuke someone else in sin:
   a. Take stock of your own self (1 Cor. 11:31; Gal. 6:1).
   b. Be honest about your own failures.
   c. Choose your battles wisely.

C. Be careful about what you share with unbelievers.
   1. Jesus warned about casting pearls before swine.
      a. Dogs and pigs were both abhorrent to Jews, and no one would have considered feeding them anything valuable or sacred.
      b. Some take this to mean you should not waste your time talking to hardened unbelievers about the gospel. Certainly there is some truth to that. An old saying goes, “Never wrestle with a pig. You’ll both get dirty, and the pig likes it.”
   2. Since the context has to do with judging others, Jesus may well have meant that we should use care in how we talk about our Christian brothers and sisters in the presence of unbelievers.

II. The power of prayer.

A. God promises to answer prayer.
   1. Even unbelieving fathers give good gifts to their children.
      a. In Jesus’ day, loaves of bread often had the same shape as large stones. Certain fish, such as eels, looked similar to snakes.
      b. Any father who deprived his children of basic needs would be regarded as unbelievably cruel. Why, then, can we not trust our heavenly Father to provide for our needs? (Phil. 4:19).
   2. Why do some prayers go unanswered?
      a. Sometimes (not always) our prayers are hindered by sin in our lives (Isaiah 59:1-2; Psalm 66:18).
      b. God promises to give us “good things”. Many times our opinion of what is “good” does not match His.

B. How should you pray for difficult people?
   1. Pray that God will change their hearts.
   2. Pray that God will give you the grace to deal with them.
   3. Pray that God will search your own heart and, if necessary, change you.
      • One of my seminary professors used to say, “Let God fight your battles for you.” I had been a pastor for about three years before I began to understand what he meant. Some battles are out of your hands, so the best thing to do is turn them over to God. You may be surprised at how He works things out (Romans 12:19-21).

III. A positive principle.

A. This verse is often called the “Golden Rule”.
   1. Other religions had similar rules.
   2. Jesus said, “This is the law and the prophets.” In other words, when we live by this rule, most other problems will resolve themselves.

B. What would happen if we applied this rule in our churches?
   1. There would be fewer church fights.
   2. “Worship wars” would die overnight.
      • Before you point the finger of blame at anyone for these disputes, please remember that it takes two to fight. Frankly, I’ve seen a
great deal of selfishness on both side of the debate. I daresay that if both sides committed themselves to abide by the “Golden Rule” this controversy would quickly become a thing of the past.

3. People would love each other more.
4. People outside the church would eventually take notice, and perhaps be drawn to Christ.

Conclusion: Many a retail worker has been told, “The customer is always right.” Alas, I worked in retail long enough to know that’s not strictly true. However, the customer is important even when he or she is in the wrong. Without customers, you have no business, so you must be willing to serve the bad along with the good. In the same way, your brothers and sisters in the church are sometimes in the wrong, but they’re still your brothers and sisters in Christ. It’s not always easy to love them, so pray for the ones that are difficult to love, and pray that God will show you how to love them. The world needs an example of genuine love. Can anyone provide a better example of such love than those of us that follow Christ? (John 13:34-35).

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